Nova Scotia
Advisory Council on
The Status of Women

Conseil consultatif sur la
condition féminine de la
Nouvelle-Écosse

An agency of the Province of Nova Scotia

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Women's Issues in Nova Scotia: A Backgrounder

November, 2002

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About the Council...

The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women was established by provincial statute in 1977. The Council's mandate under the Advisory Council on the Status of Women Act is to advise the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women and to bring forward the concerns of women in Nova Scotia.

The Council's work touches on all areas of women's lives, including...

- ♀ family life
- ♀ economics
- ♀ legal rights
- ♀ sexuality
- ♀ health
- ♀ education
- ♀ paid and unpaid work
- ♀ violence

Council pays close attention to the experiences of women who face barriers to full equality because of race, age, language, class, ethnicity, religion, ability, sexual orientation, or various forms of family status.

We are committed to voicing women's concerns to government and the community through policy research, information services and community liaison. Working cooperatively with women and equality-seeking organizations, our mission is to advance equality, fairness and dignity for all women.

Introduction

The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women has the following four strategic goals:

- To increase the participation of women in all their diversity in decisions that affect their lives, families and communities, with particular emphasis on those who face discrimination because of race, age, language, class, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or various forms of family status;
- To promote women's economic equality;
- To reduce violence against women in communities, workplaces and families; and
- To improve the health and well-being of women and their families.

The information found in this backgrounder is organized around these four goals and is meant to provide a concise overview of the current situation of Nova Scotian women in these areas. It is some people's belief that women's equality has been achieved. While it is true that women have made remarkable advancements in certain areas (eg., women's educational attainment and overall university enrolment), the factual information presented below indicates that much work remains to be done before women can be said to have attained overall equality in our society.

I INCLUSION

To increase the participation of women in all their diversity in decisions that affect their lives, families and communities, with particular emphasis on those who face discrimination because of race, age, language, class, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or various forms of family status.

Women's participation in decision-making has increased in recent years, but progress is uneven and gender parity has still not been achieved in party politics, in government decision-making bodies or in the corporate sector.

Since 1960, a total of only 18 women have served as members of Nova Scotia's Legislative Assembly. Of these, only one was from the Black community and none were from the Mi'kmaq community. Currently, only 4 (7.7%) of Nova Scotia's 52 MLA's are women.

Source: Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, clippings file

Women continue to face more barriers to participation in formal political decision making than men because they often lack financial clout and they experience more time constraints because of their family responsibilities. Political participation is also affected by the organizational and operational norms, expectations and values which have been established in a predominantly white and male-defined political culture. Women who are not from the dominant race or culture, therefore, experience additional barriers. Research also indicates that women in rural Nova Scotia may also face additional barriers to participating in electoral politics. !ssues related to privacy, voter expectations, and family life versus political ambition are all central concerns of rural Nova Scotian women in relation to political life.

Since 1920, when Canadian women were given the right to run as candidates in federal elections, the number of women who have run in general elections has ranged from a low of 2 (in 1926) to a high of 476 (in 1993). The number of women elected during that same period has ranged from a low of 0 (in 1949) to a high of 62 (in both 1997 and 2000).

Source: Nelson - Political Science - Canadian Politics on the Web - Women in Politics URL: http://polisci.nelson.com/women.html

Women's participation in voluntary organizations, however, has traditionally been higher than men's. For example, in 1997 the participation rate for women in Nova Scotia was 40% compared with 36% for men. Lacking access to real power, women have often used informal means or have taken an advocacy approach to try to influence decision-makers. Without negating the importance

of this approach, more women now recognize the importance of participation in electoral politics as well.

However, it has traditionally been women from the dominant race or culture and women with the time and financial resources to be active, who have been able to exercise real political influence in this way. Women who face other barriers--because of their race, class, or disability, for example--often feel, and are, even more marginalised from mainstream decision-making processes.

Why does inclusion of women from diverse experience and backgrounds matter?

Although women may hold many things in common and share many similar experiences, women are not a homogeneous group--some experiences are shared, others are not. For example, there are still strong social expectations for women to marry and bear children, but more women are forced by circumstances or are exercising the choice to raise children alone or not to have children at all. Even though many women share the experience of being mothers their experience will be shaped not only by prevailing social expectations of 'mothering' but by the conditions under which they parent, such as family status, economic circumstances and culture. Parenting as a lesbian, for example, may mean being excluded from benefits available to other families.

As a society, we cannot make fair, effective or just decisions without women's involvement. But unless participation includes women from diverse backgrounds and experience, the outcome in decision-making will still be unfair, skewed and inappropriate. The government of Nova Scotia has always tried to ensure that women from the different regions of the Province and from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds are represented on Council. Since March 2002, the Advisory Council has started holding workshops on women's political participation in different regions of the province. The Council has striven to make the workshops inclusive of women from diverse groups. It is hoped that more women will decide to participate in electoral politics as a result of these workshops.

II ECONOMIC EQUALITY

To Promote Women's Economic Equality

Women's labour force participation has grown phenomenally in this province over the course of the last several decades, doubling from 27 percent to 55 percent since 1961. In 2001, women made up close to half (47.3 percent) of the Nova Scotia labour force. Increases in labour force participation of married women and women with children are especially dramatic. In 1995, the labour force participation of Nova Scotia women with children aged 0-2 years was over 64 percent, compared with only 25 percent in 1961. In the majority of Nova Scotian husband-wife families, both partners now work outside the home.

Though the reasons women have for working outside the home are many and varied, the economic necessity of paid work is undeniable. Women are now making substantial contributions to their families' incomes. In fact, without the wife's income, twice as many husband-wife families in Nova Scotia would have fallen below the poverty line in 1997.

Female to Male Earnings Ratio for Full-Year, Full-Time Earners
Nova Scotia and Canada, 1980 - 1997

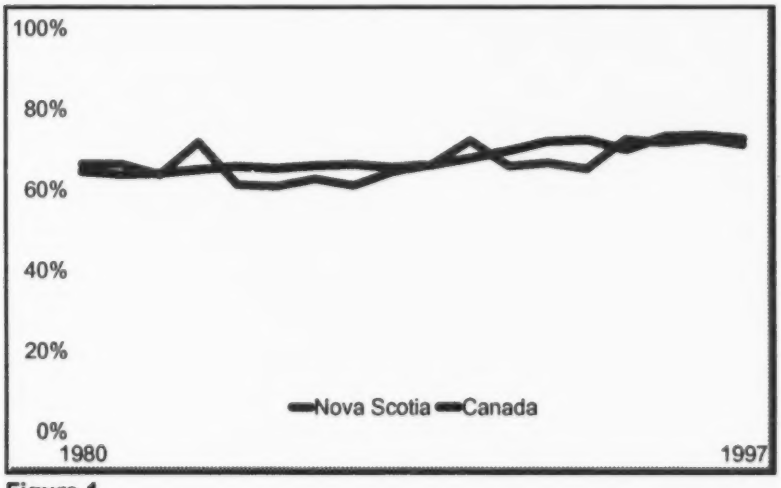


Figure 1.

Despite the increasing importance of women's incomes for their own and their families' survival, the earning power of women remains stubbornly low as evidenced by the significant gap between the earnings of women and men.

In 1997, women in Nova Scotia who worked full-year, full-time earned 71 percent as much as their male counterparts. The ratio of women's to men's earnings for *all* workers (including part-time, part-year, etc.) in Nova Scotia was 61.6 percent. Some of the factors contributing to the wage gap between women and men

include the fact that women tend to be clustered in low-paying occupations and that they tend to be over-represented amongst those working non-standard work hours (part-time/part-year/temporary).

Female to Male Earnings Ratio by Marital Status
Nova Scotia, 1980-1997

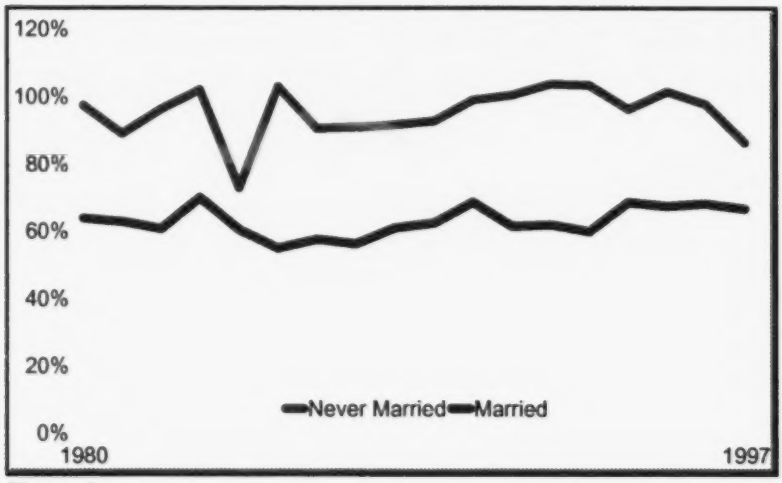
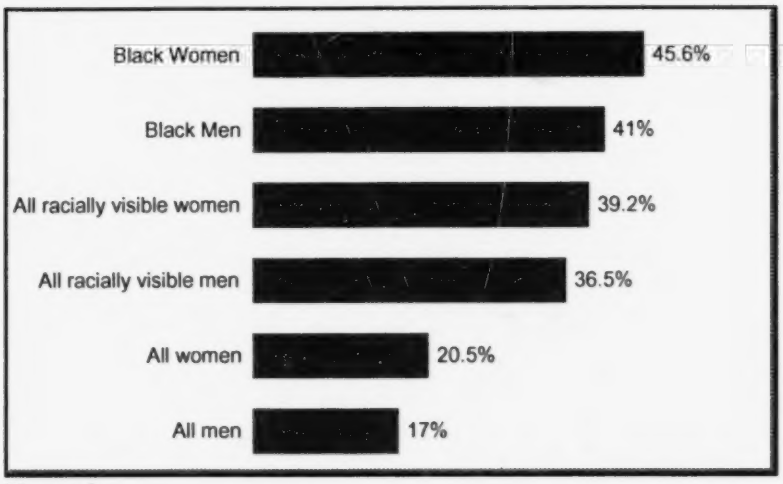


Figure 2.

Another important factor contributing to the wage gap pertains to women's roles in the home. Comparisons between the earnings of single women and single men yield few differences. Married women, who are still responsible for doing the majority of unpaid work (childcare, housework, and eldercare), are earning significantly less, on average, than married men.

Incidence of Low Income by Sex and Ethnicity
Nova Scotia, 1995



While the differences between the incomes of women and men are significant, so are income differences among different groups of women.

Figure 3.

Although average individual incomes of Aboriginal and Black women are quite similar to those of all Nova Scotian women, their incidence of low income, which is based on family rather than individual incomes, are highly disparate. The large differences in incomes of Black and Aboriginal men compared to all Nova Scotian men may account for part of this disparity as may other factors related to family income such as employment rates of spouses and rates of full-time versus part-time work, etc.

Incidence of Low Income by Family Type
Nova Scotia, 1997

The consequences of women's continuing economic inequality are obvious.

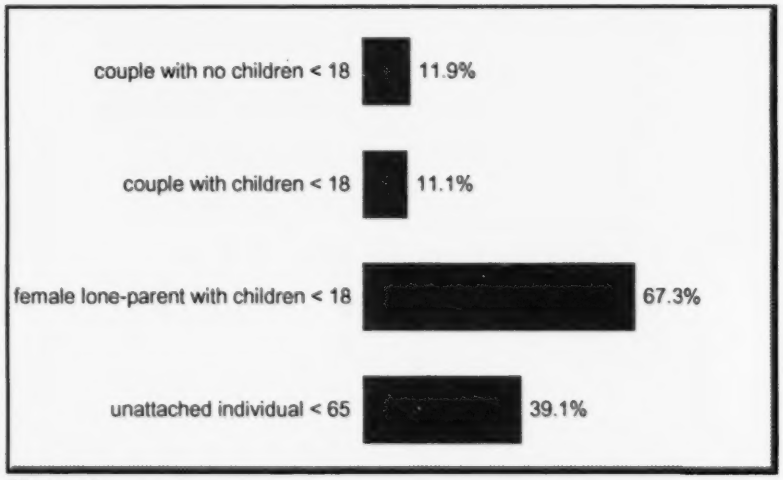


Figure 4.

In 1997, women in Nova Scotia were more likely than men to have low incomes, with certain groups of women, most notably female lone-parents, being at particularly high risk for poverty. 67.3 percent of female lone-parents with children under 18 in Nova Scotia are living below the low income cut-offs.

Correspondingly, children from lone-parent families are five times more likely to be living in low income situations than children from two-parent families. When categorized by sex, women make up the majority of social assistance recipients. When categorized by family status, lone parents, 85% of whom are women, make up the majority of social assistance recipients.

RRSP Contributors and Contributions by Sex
Nova Scotia, 1998

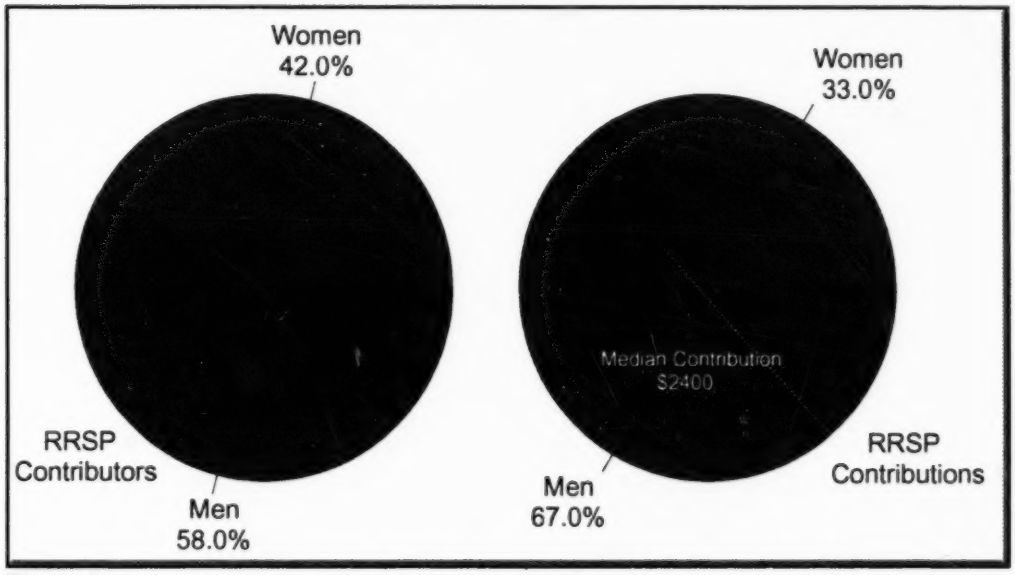


Figure 5.

As women's economic disadvantage is evident across their entire lifespan, it is not surprising that they are less likely to contribute to an RRSP than are men and are also likely to make smaller RRSP contributions than men. In consequence, unattached senior women continue to have significantly greater poverty rates than senior men.

Women and Education

Educational Attainment of Women in Nova Scotia
1976 and 1996

In the last twenty to twenty-five years, women in Nova Scotia have made tremendous progress with respect to their educational attainment and participation in post-secondary education.

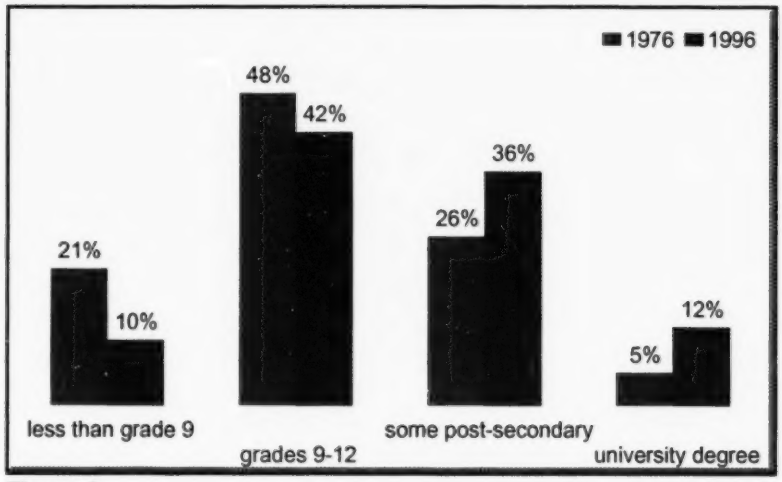


Figure 6.

Between 1976 and 1996, the proportion of Nova Scotian women with university degrees more than doubled while the proportion of women with less than grade 9 decreased by more than half. For the first time, the educational attainment of young Nova Scotian women (25-29 year-olds) now exceeds that of young men. Women now comprise the majority (58%) of full-time university undergraduates in the province and half of full-time graduate-level students. Women in Nova Scotia also outnumber or equal the number of men in undergraduate programs in science, medicine, law, and commerce/business administration.

Educational Attainment of Female Parents by Family Status
Nova Scotia, 1996

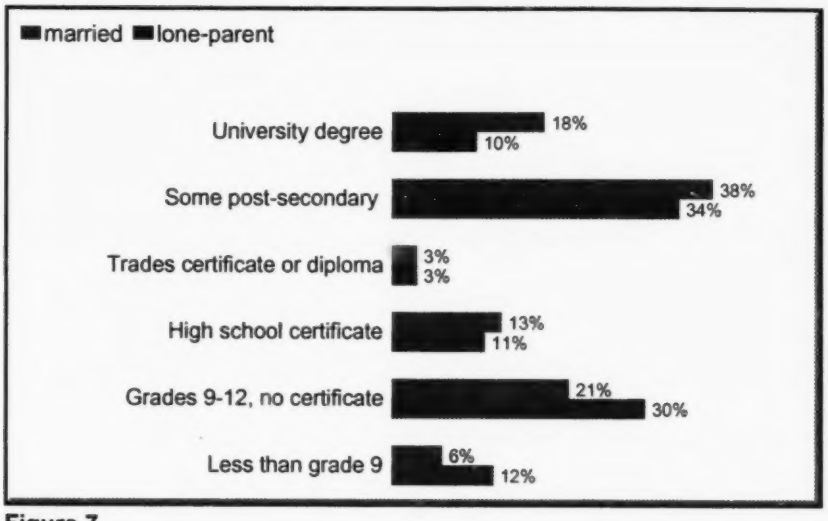


Figure 7.

While women as a whole have made significant gains in education over the past couple of decades, certain groups of women remain marginalized with respect to education and general equality. Most notably, Black women, Aboriginal women living on-reserve, and women with disabilities have substantially lower educational attainment than Nova Scotian women as a whole. Movement towards general equality must address the specific educational needs and work towards removing barriers to education for these groups of women. Female lone-parents are also educationally disadvantaged in comparison to married mothers. Improved access to education is required by all of these groups.

Despite considerable advancement since the mid-seventies, women remain under-represented in engineering and applied science in Nova Scotian universities, both at the undergraduate and graduate level.

Community College Programs by Sex
Nova Scotia, 2001-2002

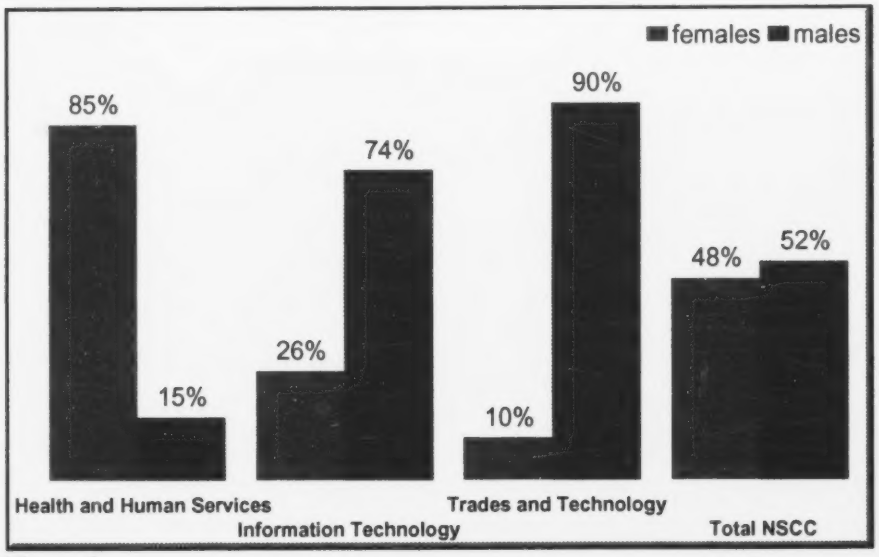


Figure 8.

Women are also under-represented in graduate-level programs in math and physical sciences and in community college information technology and technology and trades programs.

Given today's increasingly knowledge-based economy, measures must be taken to encourage women's enrolment in these fields of study and training areas.

Council plans to promote women's economic equality by working in cooperation with Women in Trades and Technology Nova Scotia (WITT-NS), the Association of Nova Scotia Women for Education and Research in Science (ANSWERS), the Hypatia group and Techsploration towards the goal of encouraging the participation of women in emerging sectors of the economy, including offshore energy, information technology, and science and trade. A major endeavour Council is planning for the coming year is the Women in Non-Traditional Occupations (WINTO) project which aims to improve women's access to high-paying occupations in growth sectors of the economy, with a specific focus on the energy sector in Nova Scotia.

Last year, the Advisory Council began convening a group of both federal and provincial public servants and community people who are knowledgeable about and experienced with women's employment and economic security issues. The Roundtable on Women's Economic Security can provide a forum for the development of shared knowledge and understanding about the changing social and economic circumstances related to women's economic independence and security; the exchange of information between public servants and community organizations about current policies and practices including suggestions for resolving ongoing issues; and for the discussion of new or emerging policy directions and initiatives.

Additionally, Council, in conjunction with Genuine Progress Indicators Atlantic, the Department of Economic Development, Status of Women Canada, and Statistics Canada, will continue to analyze the implications that women's paid and unpaid work has on their economic situation.

The situation of women in poverty, particularly single mothers, remains an on-going concern, requiring participation in social assistance reform and forthcoming changes in divorce law and other aspects of family policy, such as the availability of childcare.

Finally, the agency will continue to provide encouragement and in-kind support to the Women's Community Economic Development Network, Nova Scotia Women's FishNet and other groups working toward viable and sustainable economic development initiatives in communities affected by the collapse of the traditional fisheries and coal mining industries.

III VIOLENCE

To reduce violence against women in communities, workplaces and families

Freedom from violence and a heightened sense of personal safety play an important role in the development and maintenance of women's equality and overall well-being. The statistical information that follows provides us with a current sense of Nova Scotian and Canadian women's experience with violence, its consequences, and some of the services that have been put in place to address this issue.

Two large-scale Statistics Canada surveys, the *Violence Against Women Survey* (1993) and the *General Social Survey* (1999), have provided us with insight into the nature and prevalence of family violence and how it is changing over time. While the content of these two surveys (in relation to spousal violence) is similar, methodological differences between the two surveys exist and comparisons should therefore be made with some degree of caution. The *General Social Survey* also provides us with valuable information about violent crime victimization and its impact.

While there is reason to be cautiously optimistic with some of the 1999 findings, there are also indications that much remains to be done for women to be safe, and to feel safe, both within and outside of their homes.

Rates of spousal assault against women appear to have declined slightly in recent years. In 1993, 13 percent of women in Nova Scotia had experienced assault at the hands of their spouse or common-law partner within the preceding five years. By 1999, this had declined to 8 percent.

Transition House Admissions
Nova Scotia,1992 - 2000

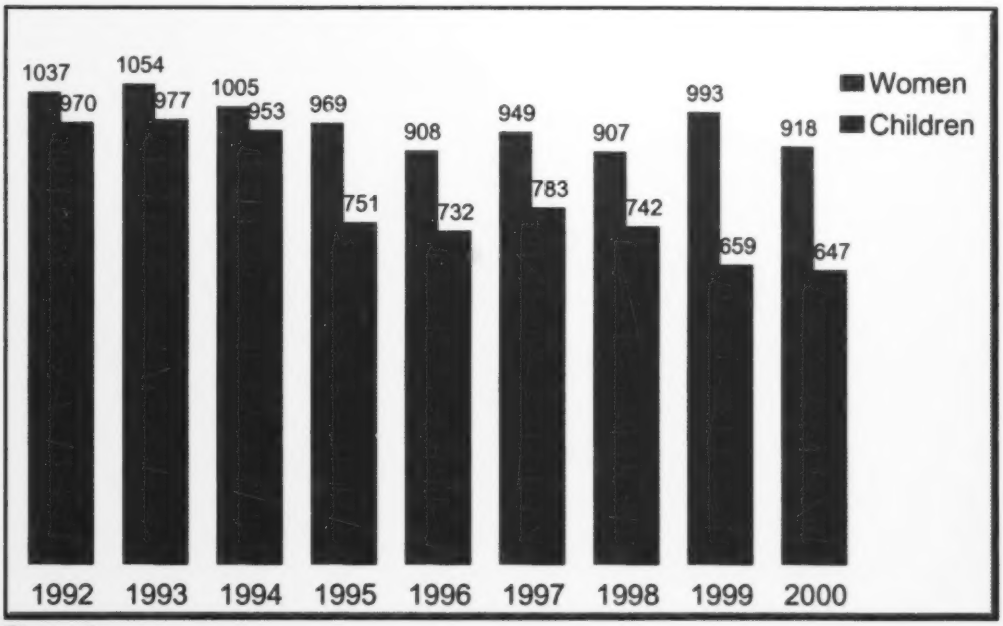


Figure 9.

Some of the possible reasons for the decrease in spousal assaults against women may be related to the increased availability of services for abused women and programs for abusive men, increased use of helping services, and higher rates of reporting of spousal violence to police by female victims. It should be noted, however, that while evidence suggests that female victims of spousal violence are more likely to report the violence to police now than they were in the past, the majority of such violence (64 percent) still remains unreported.

Although women now report experiencing spousal assault only slightly more often than men (8% versus 6% in Nova Scotia in 1999), the nature and consequences of violence are much more severe for female victims. Women, for example, are two and a half times more likely to be beaten and five times more likely to be choked than are men. Women are five times more likely to require medical attention and are five and a half times more likely to fear for their lives as a consequence of spousal violence.

Women also remain much likelier than men to be victims of spousal violence at its most extreme. Over the past two decades, three times as many Canadian women were killed by their spouse/partner than were Canadian men. In almost all provinces and territories, spousal homicides of women outnumber spousal homicides of men by at least two to one.

Spousal Homicide Rates by Sex and Marital Status of Victim
Canada, 1991 - 1999 (rate per million couples)

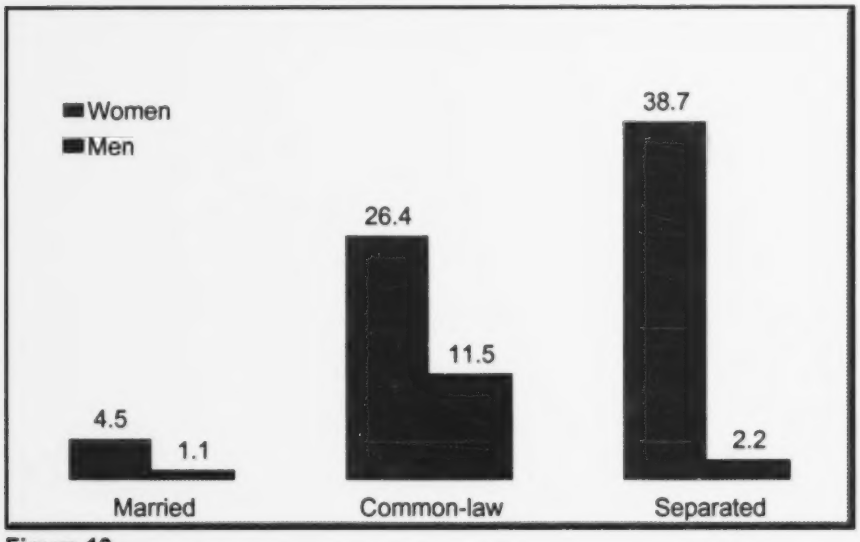


Figure 10.

Separation from a spouse or intimate partner elevates the risk of spousal homicide for women. This is especially true for young women. Women who are under 25 and separated have the highest risk of being killed by their former spouse/partner.

There are a number of socio-demographic factors related to violence against women. Young women, women in common-law relationships, women whose partners are heavy drinkers, and women whose partners engage in emotionally abusive behavior are all at higher risk of experiencing physical abuse from a spouse or partner.

Ethno-cultural factors also play a role. Aboriginal women are three times more likely to have experienced spousal violence compared to non-Aboriginal women.

Victim-Suspect Relationship
Nova Scotia Homicides, 1991 - 1998

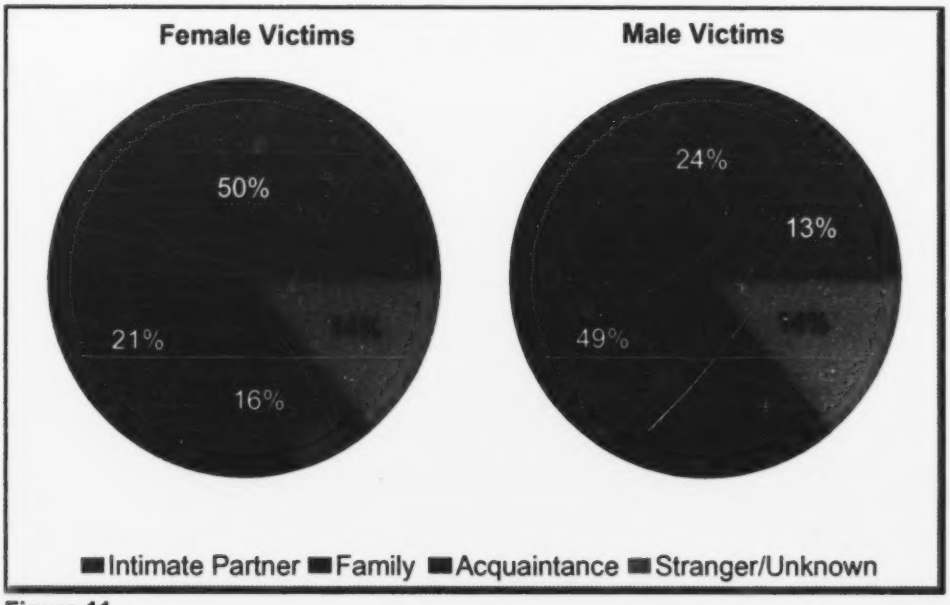


Figure 11.

Women comprised slightly more than one third (36 percent) of all homicide victims in Nova Scotia between 1991 and 1998. Half of these women were killed by their intimate partners, compared to 13 percent of male victims. Similarly, the majority of female victims of criminal harassment (stalking) were stalked by men with whom they had had a previous intimate relationship.

In the last decade, rates of reported sexual assault appear to have declined in both Nova Scotia and Canada. It is important to note, however, that police data greatly underestimates the incidence of sexual assault. Victimization surveys indicate that, at most, only 10 percent of women who have been sexually assaulted report the incident to police. Some of the reasons women give for not reporting sexual assault to police include: belief that the police could do nothing about it, concern about the attitude of police and courts toward sexual assault, fear of revenge by the offender, and fear and shame.

Measures Routinely Taken to Ensure Personal Safety
Canada, 1999

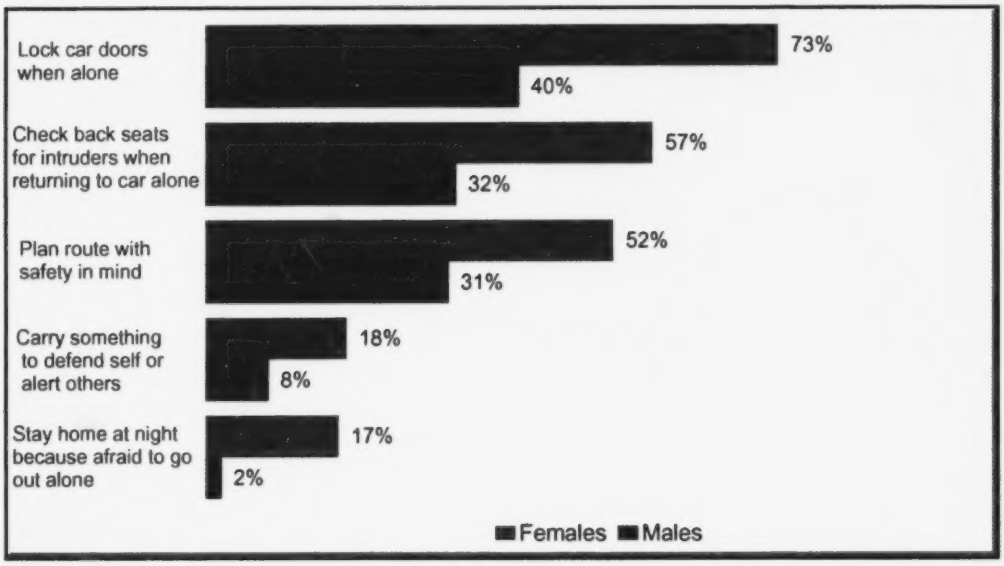


Figure 12.

Though the majority of both women and men in Canada report that they feel safe from violent crime generally, women are more likely to feel unsafe in certain circumstances, such as when using or waiting for public transportation alone after dark or walking alone after dark. Not surprisingly, therefore, women are more likely than men to take routine measures to ensure their personal safety. Close to three quarters of women routinely lock their car doors when alone and more than 8 times as many women as men (17% versus 2%) stay home at night because they are afraid to go out alone.

There are certain other forms of violence that are greatly understudied but which affect women profoundly. These types of violence include elder abuse, parent abuse, abuse of women in lesbian relationships, and abuse of women with disabilities. Much more research is required to fully understand the extent and nature of these serious problems.

IV HEALTH

To improve the health and well-being of women and their families

Over the past twenty years or so, women involved in the women's health movement in Canada drew attention to the fact that women's health experiences and issues were under-researched, misunderstood or inadequately attended to in research, health promotion and health care.

Attention to women in health research was focussed narrowly on their reproductive capacities and functions, while other health problems affecting women specifically, such as breast cancer, were under-researched. Women's vulnerability to some sexually transmitted diseases such as chlamydia or to HIV-AIDS was largely ignored.

Leading Causes of Death for Canadian Woman, 1997

Heart/Cerebrovascular Disease	37%
Cancers	29%

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 84-210-X1B

Percent of Nova Scotians with High Blood Pressure

	94/95	96/97	98/99
men	10.4%	11.7%	12.6%
women	15.5%	20.5%	20.9%

Source: Statistics Canada, Health Indicators, December 2001, Catalogue No. 82-221-XIE

On the erroneous assumption that women's experience would be the same as men's, research on health problems such as heart disease was conducted almost entirely on male subjects. Diagnosis and treatment, therefore, were based on male experience and too often resulted in the mis-diagnosis, or delayed diagnosis of serious health conditions in women.

Health critics also argued that the prevailing approach to health research and health care focussed on understanding and treating discrete diseases rather than the whole person and that health research and health care failed to adequately take into account non-biological and non-medical factors affecting health such as the physical and social environments in which we live. Factors such as income, low education, chronic unemployment, or poverty were identified as important social determinants of health in the population.

Women pointed out, however, that because of women's economic inequality, gender-based power imbalances and women's family responsibilities and status, the social and economic environments were different for women and men. For example, inequalities such as income disparities and higher rates of poverty, and power imbalances which feed sexism and make women more vulnerable to sexual and physical abuse, mean that there are differences in the social and economic factors affecting women's health which are shaped by inequality.

This inequality can affect women's health in particularly harmful ways. For example: poverty may impede proper access to health care; physical or emotional abuse affects self esteem and the sense of control over one's life; it may also be a factor in the higher levels of depression amongst women.

Percent of Nova Scotians with Probable Risk of Depression

	94/95	96/97	98/99
men	5.4%	4.0%	3.6%
women	10.4%	5.3%	9.0%

Source: Statistics Canada, Health Indicators, December 2001, Catalogue No. 82-221-XIE

Smoking and Drinking, 15-19 year-olds, Canada

Smoking Daily	94/95	96/97	98/99
males	18.6%	21.3%	18.5%
females	20.9%	22.8%	25.1%
Excessive Drinking (ie., having five or more drinks on one occasion, 12 or more times a year)			
males	24.8%	29.5%	40.5%
females	11.2%	22.6%	26%

Source: Statistics Canada, Health Indicators, December 2001, Catalogue No. 82-221-XIE

The media portrayal of women can influence self image and eating behaviours; striving for acceptance through peer approval may influence sexual activity or the level of smoking amongst teenage girls.

Family responsibilities combined with many of the jobs women perform in the labour market probably create particularly high levels of stress for women. Such problems would likely be compounded by cultural differences or marginalization created by racism or homophobia.

Percentage of Canadians with High Life Stress by Age Group and Sex, 1994/95

Age	Women	Men
18-19	33.7%	35.5%
20-24	35.5%	29.4%
25-34	31.8%	25.5%
35-44	32.0%	21.5%
45-54	29.0%	21.5%
55-64	22.3%	17.2%
65-74	14.2%	12.0%
75 +	9.7%	5.1%
total (18+)	27.4%	21.6%

Source: Statistics Canada, Health Indicators, December 2001, Catalogue No. 82-221-XIE

Some progress has been made in recent years to rectify the biases and omissions of earlier years. Diseases which mainly affect women, such as breast cancer and osteoporosis are receiving more attention in research. The concepts of "gender" and "culture" have been included in the list of social determinants of health promoted by Health Canada. These changes mean there is a greater likelihood in the future that the specific social and economic factors that influence the lives of women and people from diverse cultural and racial groups will be taken into account in research, health promotion and health care.

With the funding of five Centres of Excellence on Women's Health by Health Canada several years ago, the specific issues affecting women's health have begun to receive more attention in research. However, much remains to be done.

Besides Council's involvement in research and ongoing work to improve the social and economic conditions that adversely affect women's health, Council intends to work within government and partner with other agencies to build awareness amongst parents, educators, the general public and women themselves and to seek new ways to improve the health of women and girls.

In partnership with the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, the Advisory Council has embarked on a five-year program of research to examine the health impacts of women's caregiving work. The program will examine the relationships between paid work, unpaid caregiving, and health across women's lifespan. Diversity of both types of caregiving (eg., child care, eldercare, care of

adult children with disabilities, persons with HIV, etc.) and backgrounds (cultural, socio-economic, etc.) of caregivers is an important part of the research.

Sources

Figure 1.
Female to Male Earnings Ratio for Full-Year, Full-Time Earners
Nova Scotia and Canada, 1980-1997
Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue No. 13-217-XIB.

Figure 2.
Female to Male Earnings Ratio by Marital Status
Nova Scotia, 1980-1997
Source: Statistics Canada, Custom Tabulation provided by Statistics Division, Nova Scotia Department of Finance.

Figure 3.
Incidence of Low Income by Sex and Ethnicity
Nova Scotia, 1995
Source: Statistics Canada: 19956 Census, Table 94F0009XDB96003.

Figure 4.
Incidence of Low Income by Family Type
Nova Scotia, 1997
Source: Canadian Council on Social Development, *The Canadian Fact Book on Poverty*, 2000.

Figure 5.
RRSP Contributors and Contributions by Sex
Nova Scotia, 1998
Source: Statistics Canada, Small Area and Administrative Data, provided by Nova Scotia Department of Finance, Statistics Division.

Figure 6.
Educational Attainment of Women in Nova Scotia
1976 and 1996
Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 Census, Table 93F0028XDB96002.

Figure 7.
Educational Attainment of Female Parents by Family Status
Nova Scotia, 1996
Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 Census, HRDC custom tabulation.

Figure 8.
Community College Programs by Sex
Nova Scotia, 2001-2002
Source: Nova Scotia Community College.

Figure 9.
Transition House Admissions
Nova Scotia,1992 - 2000
Source: Nova Scotia Department of Community Services.

Figure 10.
Spousal Homicide Rates by Sex and Marital Status of Victim
Canada, 1991 - 1999 (rate per million couples)
Source: Statistics Canada, *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Catalogue No. 85-224-XIE.

Figure 11.
Victim-Suspect Relationship
Nova Scotia Homicides, 1991 - 1998
Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Homicide Survey, 1998, data provided by Nova Scotia Department of Justice.

Figure 12.
Measures Routinely Taken to Ensure Personal Safety
Canada, 1999
Source: Statistics Canada, *A Profile fo Criminal Victimization: Results of the 1999 General Social Survey*, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Catalogue No. 85-553-XIE.